

**December 18, 2011**

**Christmas Do you hear what I hear?**

**Matthew 2:13 - 18**

It's Christmas time again, & all kinds of sounds remind us of that - bells ringing, choirs singing, & music filling the air. But in the midst of all the joyous sounds of our "jolly, holly holiday" there are other sounds - sounds of anguish & grief.

For many this is a difficult time of the year, as all sorts of things come in to remembrance. Some experience the sound of silence in loneliness. There's the sound of pain, suffering, hunger and people without homes. Many sounds – many sounds go unnoticed.

If we could go back nearly 2,000 years to that very first Christmas, we would hear a variety of sounds there, too - sounds of a busy inn, of animals feeding in a stable, of angels singing on high, of excited shepherds coming to see the baby in the manger, & I'm sure, Mary's voice in a soft lullaby, as she sings to her newborn baby.

But those happy & excited sounds are soon replaced by the harsh shouts of soldiers, the cries of children, & the wailing of anguished mothers. Turn with me in your Bibles, if you wish, to Matthew 2:13-18, & listen as I read what happened next after the Magi left the baby Jesus to return home.

**Matthew 2:13-18**

**“<sup>13</sup> Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.”**

**<sup>14</sup> When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “*Out of Egypt I called My Son.*”<sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. <sup>17</sup> Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: <sup>18</sup> “*A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more.*”’”**

This passage of scripture reveals an insecure & nearly insane old king who felt his rule threatened when he heard that another king had been born. And when he couldn't find that child, he issued a decree that all the little boys in Bethlehem, 2 years old & younger, were to be executed.

So when we talk about what we hear during Christmas -- maybe we need to remember also the

shouts of soldiers, the cries of children, & sobbing of their mothers, the tears of those who miss loved ones, for these are a part of the Christmas sounds, too. They are a part of what God is trying to communicate to us at this season of the year.

## **THERE IS SUFFERING IN THE WORLD & GOD CAME TO BEAR IT WITH US**

The Bible is always honest. So when it tells the story of Christmas, it not only tells about the Joy of Christ birth, with angels & shepherds & wise men who come with gifts of gold & frankincense & . myrrh, **BUT it also tells about Herod & his hatred, of soldiers & of little children being murdered.**

It would be virtually impossible for us to imagine what it was like to be a parent in Bethlehem the night of that slaughter. To have a little boy, maybe 18 months old, who has captured your heart, & the sparkle in his eyes brightens up your day.

Then to have soldiers burst into your home, searching through every room until they find your son, carrying him outside to take his life from him. The Anguish, pain, suffering and emptiness of it all! **Yet that is a part of the Christmas story, too.** We just choose not to talk about it.

Anguish is still very much a part of the Christmas scene even today. There are many who are suffering, many who are lonely, & many who are grieving. **And for that reason they find little joy in the Christmas celebration.**

**The Good News is -- Christmas comes to a suffering world.** Christmas tells us that God doesn't guarantee to take away our suffering, rather He will be with us and bear it with us.

Eli Weisel, a Jewish author, who wrote the book entitled, "Night," was a slave laborer in a WW2 German concentration camp. He writes about the Holocaust & the things that happened to him during the war.

He writes how during this horrid time of mistreatment – someone asked “Where is God Now?” Weisel said he turned and said, “God is here, right here suffering with us.”

Well, I'm not sure I can fully understand everything that Weisel was trying to say, **but I am convinced that is the message of Christmas.**

**Our God is not beyond the stars, far away in the heavens. Our God came to be with us, suffering with us, hurting with us, bleeding with us. That's the message of Christmas. Christmas is Emmanuel – God with us!**

But that's not all that Christmas is about – There is another message we often refuse to take time to receive – it says:

## **THERE IS UNCERTAINTY IN THE WORLD, & GOD CAME TO LEAD US THROUGH IT**

Think of the uncertainty in the lives of Mary & Joseph as they packed up their meager belongings to leave Bethlehem & head for Egypt.

**Mary & Joseph fled to Egypt, not knowing where they would stay. They didn't know what the future held for them. All they knew was that God was leading the way.**

They had been told by an angel that Jesus was to be the Savior, that He would save His people from their sins. **But what was their responsibility in this?** How were they to raise the Son of God? What were they to do next? And what did the future hold for them? There was so much uncertainty in it all.

Our lives are uncertain too. **Parents** wonder about their children – did they raise them right – will they be able to realize their dreams.

**Teenagers** are wondering if they will ever graduate from High school. And if they do, will they be accepted into the college they want? And if they are, will they be able to pass their courses? **And if they get their degree, will it be a degree that will have any relevancy 10 years from now?** Will they be able to make enough money to support a family?

In midlife we may wonder if we'll will have a job next year, if we'll will ever get our houses paid for, if our children will ever amount to anything. Is the pain in our back just a minor pain, or is it serious? Will we ever be able to retire? Will there be any money left in Social Security when we do? We're wondering. **We're always wondering.**

And if we've made it to retirement – we might wonder if we have prepared enough to have enough to carry us through this time of our lives. Then too we might wonder about our children and how they will manage their lives.

**You see, life is uncertain. Mary & Joseph could do nothing but trust that God was leading the way, & that He would take care of them. That is the reality for you and I as well. Yes we are called and expected to do our part – to teach our children the Word of God ... to prepare for the future ... yet the bottom line is--- we must trust God.**

**This Jesus whose little body was jostled around on His journey to Egypt would one day tell the multitudes how God cared for the birds of the air & the lilies of the field. "And if God would feed the birds of the air & clothe the lilies of the field," He said, "then you mustn't be**

**concerned about what you're going to eat, or what you're going to wear, because God cares for you."**

**As Christians, we have the advantage of knowing that while we do not know what tomorrow holds, we do know Him who holds our tomorrows in His hands, & He wants us to let Him lead the way.**

There is uncertainty, but there is a God who leads us through that uncertainty, & that is the message of Christmas, too.

**Physical death is a reality, but Jesus came and overcame death to give all who would live for Him eternal life.**

There was death on that night so long ago in Bethlehem when Herod went on a rampage. **Many died that night.**

**But there was one child who was saved, one child who was carried off into Egypt.** This one child who was saved would one day become a victim himself. His death would be different than any other. He would die on a cross, not for His own sins, but for the sins of others. He would die so that we could live.

**Because Jesus Christ paid the debt neither you nor I could pay – He was the sacrifice for all our sins, death was defeated, overcome by God. There is death in our world, but there is a God who has overcome it.**

We have been reminded of that many times as we have seen loved ones go on to their eternal reward. We miss the sound of their voices & the touch of their hands. We miss their company & their friendship. And there is an emptiness & a scar in our life that will probably never heal because death is real.

And God doesn't come to take it away. It will always be here, with us. **This is the message of Christmas, "God takes away the sting of death, because Jesus Christ has conquered & given us victory over it." This world . is not our home, & the grave is not our goal**

A family had started putting up a nativity scene in their front yard. All of them were carrying out the little statues to put in the nativity scene. Finally everything was in place - Mary & Joseph & the manger & the baby, & angels & shepherds & all the barnyard animals.

Then little Jimmy came out carrying one of his favorite toys, the figure of the fierce Tyrannosaurus Rex, king of the dinosaurs. It was one of those plastic figures that you inflate, &

in comparison to the other figures it was an enormous thing, towering over them all, & certainly not something to have in a nativity scene.

The Dad said, "I tried to tell him, 'Son, you have to take that back because it doesn't belong there. Dinosaurs existed thousands of years before the baby Jesus, & it just doesn't belong in a nativity scene.'"

But little Jimmy insisted, so they finally put it there behind all the other figures - a fierce dinosaur hovering over the manger & everything else.

Then he said, "As we stood back & looked at it, we realized that maybe that dinosaur says more than we realized. For over each of us there is this menacing character that threatens to rob us of all our joy & peace & cheer."

"But Christmas reminds us that the baby in the manger is stronger than all the dinosaurs in your life or mine. And God has given us the victory through the gift of His Son."

**God, through Jesus Christ, has come to help us in our times of suffering, to lead us in our times of uncertainty, & to give us victory in life, in relationship with Him.** And He offers Himself to you as a gift, as a sacrifice for your sins, & He waits for you to respond to gift, to open it – explore it – receive it into your life.